

February 3, 2004

Jefferson Awards Editor
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
PO Box 1909
Seattle, WA 98111-1909

Dear Jefferson Awards Editor:

I am writing to support the nomination of Bruce Bentley for the 2004 Jefferson Award for public service.

Bruce is currently a member of the Southwest Community Center Advisory Council, a board member of the Associated Recreation Council, and the chair of the seven-member Board of Park Commissioners, which advises Seattle Parks and Recreation, the Mayor, and the City Council on policies and issues. These are all volunteer positions.

Staff at the Southwest Community Center first recruited Bruce as a volunteer coach for his son's basketball team nearly 20 years ago. They were so impressed with his gentle but strong guidance, they invited him to join the Advisory Council in 1985. He has been active on the council ever since. Mayor Norm Rice first appointed him to the Park Board in 1997. He became Board chair in 2001.

Professionally, Bruce has spent the past 25 years working in the field of waste reduction, most recently with the Rabanco Company.

There are countless examples of Bruce's dedicated and selfless service to the community and his positive impact on youth. He is renowned for his willingness to pitch in at Southwest Community Center's many public events such as egg hunts, Halloween parties, Christmas Ship events, Spring Clean, sports card shows, and plant sales. Says one former Southwest staffer, Junior Kitiona, "Bruce is at every event and is always the first one to get there and the last one to leave." At the center's spring egg hunts, for instance, he helps hide eggs and candy, then rushes to help pass out prizes to kids. One year, when more children than expected showed up, Bruce went to the store to buy more candy, paying for it out of his own pocket.

Parks Advocate

Bruce has always been a strong advocate for major improvement projects at or near Southwest Community Center. He led the drive to fund and build a new outdoor play area at the center in 1997, and when it came time for construction, Bruce led a team of volunteers in the pouring rain one Saturday morning to install and connect the play equipment. In the late 1990s, he successfully lobbied the City Council to include a major addition to the Southwest Community Center in the voter-approved 1999 Community Center Levy. Many credit him with single-handedly convincing the Council to fund this project that will build a new gym, teen center, and computer room. Now in the planning phase, the additions will have a huge impact on neighborhood youth. Bruce also pushed for the project to upgrade the nearby Sealth High School sports field and other athletic facilities as part of the \$150 million 1998 Seattle Public Schools levy to improve school buildings and fields. Seattle Parks programs and the general public use the Sealth field when it is not in use by the school. Bruce was a consistently strong and passionate advocate for the \$200 million Pro Parks Levy, helping to get it on the ballot and campaigning for its eventual passage by voters in November 2000. The eight-year Levy is funding more than 100 projects to improve parks and facilities, increase maintenance during peak park use, expand programs for teens, seniors and environmental stewardship, and make improvements at the Woodland Park Zoo.

Bruce sees the big picture, and advocates for youth throughout the city, not just in his neighborhood. As a volunteer officer and member in the Associated Recreation Council (ARC), a non-profit which partners with member advisory councils and Seattle Parks and Recreation to provide recreation programs and activities through community centers, environmental education centers, and other facilities, Bruce led an effort to make sure funding is distributed equitably across the system and that all Seattle citizens, especially children and teens, have equal access to parks programs, such as after-school programs. This led to significant improvements in the ARC organization and partnership with the city with an emphasis on accountability. At every opportunity he promotes ARC and parks programs to the Mayor, City Council, the community, and at national parks and recreation conferences. At every level, from elected officials to neighborhood kids, Bruce is held in the highest esteem—which makes him that much more effective. When Bruce Bentley talks....

Community Work

Outside of his considerable parks and recreation involvement—and while raising three children—Bruce has found time to be a member and past president of the Rainier Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the West Seattle Chamber of Commerce. In 1999, he helped lead a series of events called the “Inclusion Solution” that brought together community and various community services such as housing, human services, health care, and churches to better connect people to these services and to each other. Bruce also participated in the development of the Westwood/Highland Park Neighborhood Plan.

Youth Mentorship

Perhaps Bruce Bentley's greatest accomplishment is his leadership and mentorship of youth. As anyone who works with kids knows, this takes dedicated effort over many years. Bruce's approachable, friendly demeanor puts everyone at ease, especially young people. As one of his volunteer colleagues put it, "Bruce loves people and loves public service, and his job, and his happiness is contagious." At the local stores in southwest Seattle, Bruce cannot shop for very long without being recognized and warmly greeted by young people and adults alike. Everyone knows him on a first-name basis.

Much more than a friendly face, Bruce has been an important role model, leader, and "street father" to kids. Southwest Community Center staff recall many a wayward teenager who Bruce has guided into positive activities. In one case, he noticed a young man hanging out with the wrong crowd in the wrong locations—places drug dealers were known to frequent—and he took the initiative to speak with the teenager and helped redirect him into an internship at the community center. This led to a summer job, and eventual employment with the Parks Department. Bruce has also been a respected mentor of Parks staff members, particularly at Southwest Community Center.

I've known Bruce since I began at Seattle Parks and Recreation in 1990, and I can personally attest to his unfailing good will, dedication, impeccable character, and highly effective leadership. I have come to rely on Bruce's advice and even-handed analysis of the many issues and policies that come before the department and the Park Board. And when the issues are contentious, Bruce calms the waters with his tactful and intelligent approach. Bruce is an inspiration to me and all of the staff members, community people, and young people he encounters, and I enthusiastically nominate him for the Jefferson Award.

If you have any questions, or need names and numbers of staff and community members as references for Bruce (there are legions!), please call me at 206-684-8022.

Sincerely,

Ken Bounds
Superintendent
Seattle Parks and Recreation